



Cahiers d'Asie centrale

24 | 2015

Littérature et Société en Asie centrale

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/asiacentrale/2991>

ISSN: 2075-5325

Publisher

Éditions De Boccard

Printed version

Date of publication: 10 March 2015

Number of pages: 293-325

ISBN: 978-2-84743-112-4

ISSN: 1270-9247

Electronic reference

Gulnara Aitpaeva, « Kyrgyz Prose During Perestroika: Anticipating or Constructing the Future? », *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* [Online], 24 | 2015, Online since 10 March 2016, connection on 02 May 2019.

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/asiacentrale/2991>

Kyrgyz Prose During Perestroika: Anticipating or Constructing the Future?

Gulnara AITPAEVA*

Introduction

When stopping by any one of Bishkek bookstores or boutiques today, what strikes you immediately is the diversity of books. Many people can count on finding the book they need, from atheists and religious zealots, politicians and apolitical public, nationalists and cosmopolitans, foreign and domestic migrants, to 'physicists and lyrists,' athletes, artists, and scholars. You may, of course, not find the book you need, but you will in the process see a lot of what either catches your interest or is not your cup of tea. While looking for that needed book, you do not hesitate to think that the Bishkek book market, just like the entire country's book market, did not always feature such a diverse selection. Therefore, we then come upon

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the question of when and how the path to this modern-day diversity of the literary field started.

This article suggests that the foundation for the heterogeneity of the literary field as we know it today was laid from 1985 to 1991. These years are known in modern history as perestroika.¹ I believe that the ‘field of literature’ and the ‘field of power’ in Kyrgyzstan began to interact during perestroika in such a way that started influencing not only the literary field, but also the structure of society itself. Some scholars regard spring of 1985 as a beginning of perestroika (Žukov, 2006, pp. 26-32). In April 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, publicly announced a need of reforming the Soviet society and laid out the strategic vision of the reform. National economy, industry, and even activities of the Party ought to be reformed. Both in the centre of the Soviet Union as well as in national republics, arts and literature of all genres and forms became the social sphere that reacted fastest to the idea of reforms, proclaimed by the country leader.

This article explores the processes that took place in Kyrgyz fictional prose from 1985 to 1991. I suggest that prose in Kyrgyz language has been the first social field, which clearly articulated changing social consciousness in Soviet Kirgizia during the perestroika. Focus is made on emerging of new symbolic capital represented by *Manas* epic and ancient national history themes. Historical and epical novels published during this time in Kyrgyz language are examined here more as a social phenomenon than an aesthetic and literary one. Analysing Kyrgyz novels and studying the corresponding textbooks, research, and interviews with writers from the perestroika years allows seeing the shifts that were taking place over these years in one of the areas of Kyrgyz prose. These shifts took place, as Bourdieu put it, in the position of the “field of literature within the field of power,” and within the “internal structure of the field of literature” as a consequence (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 25). The shifts that have taken place in this area of literature revamped everything literary, and subsequently everything public.

¹ This article was written as part of the project “The History of *Perestroika* in Central Asia (socio-political transformation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia in 1982-1991),” sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation from 2010 to 2013. The author is grateful to Dr Svetlana Jacquesson for providing valuable comments and recommendations on this paper. These comments have encouraged looking at comparative research perspectives that may be examined in the future.

The Beginning of Perestroika: Kyrgyz Literature Within the Field of Power

Pierre Bourdieu claimed, “The field of cultural production is subordinate politically and economically within the field of power” (*ibid.*, p. 26). So far, we have not found any specialised publications that study the economic aspect of the development of Kyrgyz literature during the Soviet era. That the link between literature and the economy in fact exists became evident for the first time in the perestroika years during the boom in literary monthlies in the USSR (Konstantinova, 2009, pp. 126-139), while the circulation of the journal *Literaturnyj Kyrgyzstan*² [Literary Kyrgyzstan] exploded in the Kyrgyz SSR.

Kyrgyz literary studies first touched on the link of literary production with the economy in the early 2000s on the basis of the processes that took place during perestroika. Renowned Kyrgyzstan’s scholar Kačkynbaj Artykbaev, the author of: *XX kylymdyn kyrgyz adabiâtynyn tarykhy* [History of Twentieth-Century Kyrgyz Literature], laments:

Artistic unions have become worse, and writers are no longer able to publish their written works. The door has opened up for sloppy works and publications that claim to be considered books. Authors with either money or rich relatives would pay for and start producing book-like publications. As a result, high ideological and aesthetic requirements that were made for fictional literature are no longer taken into account. The time of mediocre arbitrariness or the artistically pedestrian person with money is now upon us.
(Artykbaev, 2004, p. 570)

We will note that what Artykbaev calls “high ideological and aesthetic requirements,” within the context of Kyrgyz Soviet literature, were first and foremost ideological requirements that ensured literature’s political subordination to the ideals of the authorities. Nothing but “serious literature” (Wachtel, 2006, p. 8) was openly produced and available on the Kyrgyz book market until the mid-1980s.

As we can see, the issue of the link between literature and the economy first arose as a reaction to the crisis of the late 1980s, rather than as an analysis of objective processes and trends. This reaction appeared as lamenting and

² *Literaturnyj Kyrgyzstan* is a literary and art, social and political magazine established in 1955 and has been published since then in Russian language.

remorse similar in substance and style to the “complaining” and “crying” that Nancy Ries described in *Russian Talks* (Ries, 1997, pp. 83-125).

What Bourdieu labelled “the position of political subordination,” can be reworded to be more accustomed and recognisable for our context, namely following the principles of socialist realism. Renowned Kyrgyz literary specialist Kenešbek Asanaliev noted that socialist realism “as if was conceived and appeared together with national literature itself” (Asanaliev, 1995, p. 59). In referring to the history of Kyrgyz Soviet literature from 1917 to the perestroika era, he claims the following in his typically succinct manner:

Everyone knows that conformism, existence through conforming to an ideological dictatorship, is the main merit and quality within the nature of literature in socialist realism. No one even had the thought of opposing it, of dissenting, of trying to distinguish oneself from it. Literary fiction was developed upon the same principle of hierarchy and subordination that the supreme leadership was built upon: whoever became closer to the government and politics, and did so faster, was the one to receive the corresponding fame and see their artistic recognition increase and become stronger, and there was no other way about it. A work of literary fiction was judged and assessed using the same principle.

(*Ibid.*, p. 63)

You could argue with Asanaliev, but only over individual details, such as there having been a “thaw” (*ottepel'*) in the late 1960s in Kyrgyz literature (Toktogulova, 2001). In essence, however, it is hard to argue against the scholar. Asanaliev showed specific mechanisms and examples of Kyrgyz literature's political dependence based on analysing the mutual relations of renowned Kyrgyz writers and of bilingualism in the work of Chingiz Aitmatov (Asanaliev, 1995, pp. 57-85).

You can visibly observe the rapport of power to literature as that of ‘macrocosmos’ to ‘microcosmos’ that Bourdieu described, the priority of power and the secondariness of literature, by flipping through the pages of any textbook on the history of Kyrgyz literature. This principle is kept in Kačkynbaj Artykbaev's textbook mentioned above as well, even though it was written and published after Kyrgyzstan became independent. His textbook is based on the following principle: first a detailed description of the social and political situation, congresses, and other CPSU (Communist Party

of the Soviet Union) assemblies, and only then a description of the literary processes.

Bourdieu proposed the following formula for calculating culture's independence from power: "The level of independence of the culture-production field depends on how subjected the foreign (heteronomous) principle of hierarchisation is to the domestic (autonomous) principle of hierarchisation" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 26). This analytical expression demonstrates that Kyrgyz literature at the beginning of perestroika from 1985 to 1987 did not have any level of independence or mechanisms for influencing the authorities. Therefore, what is important is how the literary field during the perestroika years reacted to the changes in the field of power.

The Public Confrontation Between the Fields of Power and Literature

Several significant events that certainly signalled change in Soviet Kyrgyzstan's literary field took place in 1986. Three of these events have to do with the outstanding Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov. In spring 1986, Chingiz Aitmatov became the head of the Union of Writers of the Kyrgyz SSR. In June of that same year, the journal *Novyy Mir*³ [New World] began publishing his novel *Plakha* [The Scaffold]. Come October, Aitmatov put together an event that went down in history as the Issyk-Kul Forum (Gorškov & Marčenko, 1987; Akmatalliev, 2013, p. 61-64). The 7th Congress of the Kyrgyz SSR Union of Writers, held in June 1986, is yet another key event from the perestroika years.

The USSR Union of Writers was the echelon of the literary authorities and a political administrative tool (Konstantinova, 2009, pp. 54-57; Wachtel, 2006, pp. 33-39). The Kyrgyz SSR Union of Writers was no exception to the rule: it controlled the development of literature just as much and was accountable to the authorities (Asanaliev, 1995, pp. 42-48; Artykbaev, 2004, pp. 256-262; Dâtlenco, 2010, pp. 191-198). By the time perestroika commenced, Chingiz Aitmatov was already a world-famous writer of prose, a national writer of the Kyrgyz SSR, a hero of socialist labour, a member of the Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz SSR, etc. (Akmatalliev, 2013, pp. 50-51). Moreover, he had a very ambiguous relationship with the authorities and

³ *Novyy Mir* is a literary and art magazine that has been published in Moscow since 1925.

several other writers (Asanaliev, 1995, pp. 60-63; Artykbaev, 2004, pp. 562-563). The writer Kazat Akmatov in his recollections directly credits Chingiz Aitmatov of having become the head of the Union of Writers with the dismissal of Turdakun Usubaliev, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the CPK (Communist Party of the Kyrgyz SSR). “Chingiz Aitmatov took his rightful place as the head of the Kyrgyz SSR Union of Writers only after Turdakun Usubaliev left power” (Akmatov, 1998, p. 49). The correlation between the dismissal of the government’s most influential person and the arrival of the Kyrgyz SSR’s most renowned writer abroad was discussed several times in interviews with cultural figures over the age of fifty. Incidentally, *Literaturnyj Kyrgyzstan* editor-in-chief and writer Alexander Ivanov, in responding to whether Chingiz Aitmatov had been appointed or elected, said: “I at any rate don’t remember broad elections. After all, the way things were done was that whoever was appointed was elected” (interview with the author, 2013).

It would be unjustified, however, to claim that Chingiz Aitmatov being head of the Kyrgyz SSR Union of Writers instantly strengthened the stance of literature in respect to the authorities and increased its independence. The 7th Congress of the Kyrgyz SSR Union of Writers became one of the first arena for a public standoff between literary and government leaders (Mamytov, 1985, p. 24). Tugolbaj Sydykbekov the founding father of Kyrgyz Soviet literature, or as Bourdieu put it, one of the principal ‘agents’ of the literary field, publically criticised the Communist Party. Witnesses recall that Sydykbekov over the course of an hour made such statements as:

The mother tongue has become a bone-dry spring [...] Our history is an intricate lie [...] Our culture is an inconsistent beverage deprived of a national background.

(Akmatov, 1998, pp. 48-53)

Sydykbekov focused particular attention on the unjust criticism and repression of history writers. As Kazat Akmatov recalled in an interview, he received a phone call the next day from the Central Committee of the CPSU and was given the mandatory order, as one of the secretaries of the Union of Writers, to get a handle on the situation and bring the “nationalist Sydykbekov” to his senses (*ibid.*, p. 51).

Based on such important events as the appointment of Chingiz Aitmatov and the nature of the discourse at the 7th Congress of the Kyrgyz SSR Union

of Writers, the claim can be made that a public confrontation and open battle between the fields of literature and power commenced in the Republic in 1986 through 1988. On the one hand, writers and literary figures of the Republic were demanding the right to artistic freedom on the wave of Moscow's new policy of glasnost and perestroika, and first and foremost the right to study and address national history in a fundamentally new way. On the other hand, Absamat Masaliev, who became the first secretary of the Central Committee of the CPK in 1986, was active in rigidly controlling and educating literary figures and echelons that violated the ideological norms of the Party. He gave direct orders to coerce Sydykbekov, the father of Kyrgyz literature, to admit his mistakes in having read first hand the works of prohibited authors and not having seen any reason to rehabilitate them (*ibid.*, p. 52; Artykbaev, 2004, p. 557).

The Issyk-Kul Forum as a Chance for Artistic Independence

A new disposition between the fields of literature and power took shape in the Kyrgyz SSR between 1986 and 1988, with the Issyk-Kul Forum, which was held in October 1986 on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul, and which became a unique experience in this regard (see annex n° 16). This meeting of world-renowned writers, playwrights, artists, scholars, and public figures from many countries was not a Republic-wide or even USSR-wide event, but rather a worldwide event (Akmataliev, 2013, pp. 61-64). The Forum stood out for its unprecedented level of independence. Almost ten years later, in 1997, Chingiz Aitmatov reminisced:

The Issyk-Kul Forum, of course, was a small demonstration of the perestroika movement. Prior to then, without the authorities' permission, we weren't allowed, for example, to travel somewhere, to meet with someone, to take part in any given conference or chat amongst ourselves as people close to each other. And then, we felt like ourselves so much so that I was able to bring together a group of people very close to me on the outskirts of the empire. I had met with them before, we were acquainted, conversed, and discussed some issue; however, this is where a personal assembly took place for the first time, privately, without presence of the government running it. Therefore, this was an event for the time, a unique event. All of a sudden, someone invited someone, and these people were able to come and join us. The press paid a lot of attention to us, while everyone knew about us, and no one tried to keep us from doing anything.

(Ajtmatov, 2009)

The Forum in 1986 evidently shifted the Soviet focus: there was no ideological component included through formal and ritualised speeches by heads of the CPK and the authorities, and there was not obligatory representation from the fraternal Soviet republics. One individual person by the name of Chingiz Aitmatov was the centre of attention for the entire event. The idea of creating a 'new way of thinking' was the big news that the Forum produced. The Forum participants passed the following proclamation:

New ideas must be applied to all areas of our life, including politics, thus creating a new way of thinking. All countries should have their future depending not only on decisions that politicians take and on confrontation between individual powers. Human prowess, the power of talented people's imagination, scientists' initiatives and discoveries, poets' dreams, and the hopes of regular people are called upon to play a significant role in this. And only all this combined will allow planting the seeds of a new way of thinking, of general and political thinking.

(Gorškov & Marčenko, 1987, p. 5)

The Forum accomplished at least two goals. Firstly, it gave Mikhail Gorbachev, the initiator of perestroika, both local and global supports at the same time for carrying out his initiatives. After all, 1986 was the very beginning of perestroika when there were serious disagreements and confrontations within the Soviet leadership itself. The forum undoubtedly infused a revolutionary novelty into the context of the late Soviet period. It shifted the policy priority by designating its place within a line of other spheres of human activity.

The Issyk-Kul Forum was certainly the Kyrgyz SSR's first and only model of artists and literary figures' behaviour being independent of the Soviet system; however, the Forum also was one of the most bizarre events during the early years of perestroika. The profound paradox is that, on the one hand, the forum was indeed the first and only event where artists and literary figures were able to have an influence on the field of power on the scale of the entire Soviet Union. On the other hand, since the Forum took place in the tiny Kyrgyz SSR, it went as if unnoticed. Of course, the event was both written and talked about, and the government undoubtedly had a role in organising it; however, the local authorities perceived the points that the Forum introduced as alien and having nothing to do with them. It had little influence on the way the republic's political leaders led. The 'new way of thinking,' in which politics would be equal to other types of

human activities, was not observed in the government. A CPK assembly that took place in February 1987 saw how the first secretary of the CPK Central Committee personally stigmatised “nationalist writers” and other misguided literary figures (Artykbaev, 2004, pp. 557-558). His speech was in due order circulated across all types of state media and reached even the most remote outskirts of Kyrgyzstan.

Change in the Field of Kyrgyz Prose

In 1988 the return to Kyrgyz literature of two strictly prohibited figures during the Soviet era – the poet Moldo Kylyč (1866-1917) and the poet, scholar, and public figure Kasym Tynystanov (1901-1938) – can be perceived as the first victory of literary and cultural figures over the authorities. It took two years, from 1986 to 1988, for the rehabilitation of Moldo Kylyč and Kasym Tynystanov to be approved. The former, coming from the aristocracy, was accused of expressing “bourgeois and nationalistic ideology” (Èrkebaev, 1999, pp. 126-136; Dâtlenko, 2010, p. 167). The latter was charged with “dragging through the counter-revolutionary, bourgeois, and nationalistic ideas of alaš-orda” (Abdykarov & Žumaliyev, 1995, p. 6).

An article by Kenešbek Asanaliyev, in which the scholar wrote that the work of Moldo Kylyč and Kasym Tynystanov should be included in the new edition of *Kyrgyz sovet adabiâtynyn tarykhy* [The History of Kyrgyz Soviet Literature], caused heated public discussion (Dâtlenko, 2010, pp. 191-192). A republican commission was created in autumn 1986 to study the work of these writers. The commission, headed by Chingiz Aitmatov, presented its findings for review by an extended session of specialists at the Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz SSR; however, party leader Absamat Masaliyev opposed the professionals’ findings in early 1987 (Artykbaev, 2004, p. 557). This situation from the perestroika era demonstrates the Soviet system’s classic approach: a government representative determines the fate of literary works.

Perestroika, however, was gaining momentum in Moscow, the heart of the Soviet Union, with middle-tier bureaucrats in the CPK ranks daring to express dissent (Akmatov, 1998, p. 46). In the end, a new, nationwide commission with local and Moscow-based literary experts was created in 1988. The precedent with Moldo Kylyč and Kasym Tynystanov in a certain sense was what opened the floodgates: after they were rehabilitated, the works

of forgotten, silenced, expelled, and either little or completely unknown literature began to return to Kyrgyz literature (Ėrkebaev, 1999, pp. 82-198).

This case shows that the disposition of the field of power and that of literature changed during perestroika, with new topics, genres, and forms bursting into or germinating from within the literary field, and thus changed the literary field's structure. Bourdieu's theory states: "The field structure is a structure of distribution of varieties of capital (or power) that provide specific benefits when possessed" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 40). The topic of building a socialist society in different variations was the main beneficial capital before perestroika; however, if you are to study the composite bibliographical directory *Kyrgyz kitebi* [Kyrgyz Book] from 1986 through 1990 (Žumabekova, Žumakadyrova & Asanbekova, 2010, pp. 515-610), then you can clearly see the change in the field of Kyrgyz literature. The fundamental difference in the literary field's structure of this period comes from its ideological and thematic heterogeneity. There are different types of capital that occur here and stand shoulder to shoulder, while the borders of this diversity extend from the collections of the poet Toktogul Satylganov *Kandaj aâl tuudu êken Lenindej uuldu?* [What Kind of Woman Engendered Lenin] to the collection of the poet Abdyldaev, *Muras*⁴ [Heritage], in which previously banned *zamanist*⁵ and mullah poets were printed.

Let us turn our attention to Kyrgyz historical prose, with symbolic capital emerging for the first time in its structure during the perestroika years. This capital includes topics dedicated to the independence of ancient Kyrgyz and the epos *Manas*. Reference is made to the 1989 novels *Kök Asaba* [The Blue Banner] by Tugolbaj Sydykbekov and *Kundu ajlangan žyldar* [The Years Rotating Around the Sun] by Kazat Akmatov. The two subsequent sections of this article address them.

A new version in 1985 of Kačkynbaj Osmonaliev's novel *Yjyk žer* [Holy Land] was released during the perestroika years as well, based on *sanžyra* – oral tales about the gynaecological trees of Kyrgyz tribes and families.

⁴ The book for the first time included selected pieces from the poetry of Kalygul, Arstanbek, Moldo Kylyč and other strictly forbidden Kyrgyz writers. The reference relates to the whole book.

⁵ *Zamanist* is the term referred to a group of traditional bards describing the time they were living in, beginning of the nineteenth century (*zaman* is 'time', thus *zamanist* is a singer of his time).

The Forum of artistic creativity allowed openly making public a topic, for which at this time the Soviet government would punish other professions as severely as possible. In 1987, Sabyr Attokurov, a professor at the National University, was accused of nationalism, expelled from the Party, and dismissed from his job for attempting to introduce the topic of family and tribal relations to his Kyrgyz history course (Artykbaev, 2004, p. 558).

Kel-Kel [Come-Come], a book by the founding father of the Kyrgyz historical novel Tologon Kasymbekov, was published in 1986 after several years of review by varying levels of authority. The novel covers history spanning from the time the southern Kyrgyz were incorporated into Russia (approximately 1860) to the 1917 Revolution. This work's innovation is from its research of the said history. Being a multidimensional, far-reaching narrative that shows the Kyrgyz subjection to Russia, the novel on the whole did not violate the norms of Soviet ideology. And the title *Kel-Kel* could well be interpreted within the context of developing the storyline related to the fate of the commoner poet Toktogul Satylganov as the expectation of a just time for the destitute. However, during the perestroika years, Kasymbekov's novel accomplished a very important mission by expanding the historical overview of fiction and introduced to the public a significant number of historical figures, whose names at the time were either not mentioned or rarely cited in other spheres, including opinion-based journalism, history, and social studies. In other words, historical novel became the genre or open space where specific historical details were first rehabilitated and made legitimate; this concerned first and foremost Kurmanžan Datka, the main character also known as *Alaj Carica* [Queen of Alai]. Presenting the late nineteenth-century ruler of Alai⁶ as a favourable hero and interpreting her image as a strong ruler that recognises the power of fate and God fit in poorly with the canons of socialist realism. The emergence of such momentous heroes as Kurmanžan Datka in the literary field was a sign of the authorities' power weakening, an indicator of the literary field's primary independence. The name of this historical figure is now in all Kyrgyz history textbooks. The year 2011 was declared the year of Kurmanžan Datka to celebrate what would have been her two hundredth birthday.

Kočkon Saktanov's novel *Markumdar undoru* [Voices of the Dead] was printed in 1991, and this novel features a character by the name of Joseph

⁶ Alay is a region of the Osh province in modern-day Kyrgyzstan.

Stalin. This is how Kyrgyz literature surmounted the ban on one of the most taboo subjects, with the image of Stalin presented ambivalently as the ‘father of the people’ and a cruel leader. The emergence of this character in the field of Kyrgyz literature became an indication of the profound shift that took place in the historical novel genre.

Meanwhile, literature during perestroika continued to reproduce historical prose dedicated to establishing and fostering Soviet power, building communal farms, etc. Sagymbaj Omurbaev’s 1989 novel *Ker Ozon* [Wide Valley] is an example of such prose. The following is how its Russian annotation sounds: “S. Omurbaev’s novel pierces thought about the grandeur of our socialist society” (Omurbaev, 1989, p. 2). This parts significantly from what is written in Kyrgyz annotation, where there is not a word about socialism but rather a description of province and human lives. This divergence is as a small detail or coincidence; however, this coincidence reveals the standards that would accelerate and facilitate publishing books when complied with. Texts written in Russian passed through censorship more quickly and convincingly.

We see through the example of historical prose that the homogenous structure of the literary field during the perestroika years gets broken down, while completely new storylines and motives emerge alongside customary ones. The break-up of the established structure and the emergence of new types of artistic capital created an unusual dynamic of forces in Kyrgyz prose. Reconsidering history and the epos *Manas* were two subjects that played a leading role as the new structure of the literary field took shape.

Reconsidering Kyrgyz History under the Microscope of Perestroika

Kyrgyz history as a literary storyline endured rough times throughout the Soviet era, and an aggregate of factors explains this. On the one hand, Kyrgyz Soviet literature took shape predominantly within the paradigm of socialist realism. On the other hand, epos and folklore always had a powerful influence on Kyrgyz literature. Both paradigms, socialist realism and folklore traditions, have originally established norms and formulas that restrict the boundaries and possibilities for independent research. The political authorities and literary administrators were quick to harshly criticise writers who tried to cover the history of the Kyrgyz outside the established

boundaries (Akmatov, 1998, p. 48; Ibraimov, 2008, pp. 121-125; Artykbaev, 1994, pp. 17-31). Naum Berkovskij in 1927 noted one particularity of the Soviet historical novel:

The historical novel can have the same social ‘intense’ meaning that a novel with a relevant storyline has. The recollections that it expands upon can have significant political power.
(Berkovskij, 1989, p. 250)

Kenešbek Asanaliyev noted the extremely socially and politically biased nature of Kyrgyz historical prose (Asanaliyev, 1995, pp. 114-116). The idea of reconsidering history, which Mikhail Gorbachev announced in the early stages of perestroika in 1986 (Gorbačev, 1986, p. 119), was one of the founding notions of perestroika; however, it was history and, therefore, historical literary works in Soviet Kirgizia that all the way until 1989 served as an area where the authorities exercised strict control over literature. During the initial years of perestroika, high-ranking Party members from Moscow still had the prerogative to criticise the interpretation of history in Kyrgyz literature.

Kyrgyz SSR party leaders ostracised the writer Musa Murataliev in 1987 for his interpretation of the *Urkun* – the uprising of the Kyrgyz against the tsarist authorities in 1916 – in the novel *Mai ajynyn kukugu* [Cuckoo of May]. As opposed to, for example, Kurmanžan Datka or Stalin, the *Urkun* is still an extremely delicate subject both in Kyrgyz culture and politics (Akmatov, 2012, pp. 280,281; Ibraimov, 1993, pp. 219-238). Moreover, the novel was published in Kyrgyz for the first time before perestroika in 1981, and then only several years later, in 1987, came under criticism. The critic was postponed most likely for two reasons, namely owing to the preparation of the Russian translation for publishing and to the exasperation of ideological tension on the backdrop of perestroika. *Mai ajynyn kukugu* was “exception material” for the central and local authorities for pointing out egregious ideological errors, such as “retreating from class positions and the principles of historicism,” nationalism, and naturalism (Masaliyev, 1987, p. 1). Murataliev is convinced that “Moscow ordered” Kyrgyzstan’s political leaders to criticise him. This case with Murataliev, who is presently a citizen and merited cultural figure of Russia,⁷ is intriguing as a specific

⁷ When he received these critiques, Musa Murataliev was in Moscow, where he had been working for the Union of Soviet Writers on Kyrgyz literature since the mid-1970s. He had an apartment there, a salary and social benefits from the Union. After the collapse of the USSR, he stayed in Moscow.

example of the clashing of two forces (literary and political), which came to an end in 1987, with literary figures victorious in being able to protect Murataliev from repression. This is yet another indicator of literature's independence gaining momentum. At the same time, the incident with *Mai ajynyn kukugu*, as Musa Murataliev admitted himself, personally engendered "internal censorship" (*vnutrennûu cenzuru*) that for many years "kept his hands restrained" (*uderživala ruki*) (interview with the author, 2013).

Just two years later in 1989, however, Tugolbaj Sydykbekov's *Kök Asaba* emerged and made drastic changes to the structure of the Kyrgyz literary field; the novel was written in 1969 and sat on the shelf collecting dust for twenty years. This fact demonstrates that the quest to find meanings outside Soviet history and ideology, in the depths of Kyrgyz prose, began long before 1985. Therefore, *Kök Asaba* can be classified as the type of literature that arose in the very last stage of Soviet history and was entitled "deferred literature" (*zaderžannoj literatury*) (Konstantinova, 2009, p. 80).

Tugolbaj Sydykbekov (1912-1998) is a classic author of Kyrgyz prose, the founding father of the Kyrgyz novel, and a man recognised by the Soviet authorities through numerous ranks, awards, and benefits; he is unique in many regards (Aitpaeva, 1996, pp. 2-22). He was able to transform his talent for oral story telling into a career as a writer who ended up attaining broad recognition. Within the confines of the Soviet system, he made the artistic journey from schematic novels of socialist realism to the reconstruction of Kyrgyz statehood in *Kök Asaba* without openly conflicting with the authorities.

Kök Asaba was the first in Kyrgyz prose and, in a broader extent, in public thought, to reconstruct the life of the Yenisei Kyrgyz from the sixth to the eighth century. The novel's main character is Èr Kiši, an accomplished blacksmith, skilful warrior, and a worthy ally of his leader. Sydykbekov used the relationship between the commoner blacksmith and leaders of the *el* [people] to describe military and everyday life at the time. He recreated dozens of rituals, ceremonies, traditions, and customs that banded together and organised the social life of the ancient Kyrgyz. Besides a visible plan, everything had sacral promise – military campaigns, burials, new-leader elections, ties to ancestors and nature, and resolving internal tribal conflicts.

The author's interpretation of the lives of the Yenisei Kyrgyz was in strict compliance with the requirements that sages (*mudrecy*) and poets of various eras created in many variations. When consolidated, these rules can be pictured as "traditional Kyrgyz society based upon four pillars: the intellect of sages, the fairness of *bij* [judges], the generosity of the wealthy, and the morality of the commoners" (Sadyr uulu Žumagazy, 2013, p. 2). Sydykbekov's artistic concept reproduces these rules in great detail. The historian Vasily Bartold said that the period from the sixth to the eighth century was "the era of the great Kyrgyz power" (Bartol'd, 1963, pp. 489-500). Sydykbekov's interpretation of the prosperous Kyrgyz state of this era was based on strictly complying with moral rules rooted in the Tengrism.⁸ Èr Kiši does not strive to be the local leader, although the early death of his friend and leader of the people gave the blacksmith this very chance. The elder-led ritual showed that the deceased's five-year-old son must inherit the leader's place. By seeing through the will of Heaven and his moral duty to others (*paryz*), Èr Kiši assumes the obligation to raise the new leader.

The writer himself says that historians' works, Kyrgyz oral folk art, and observing his contemporaries served as the basis that he relied upon when writing this novel. He especially stressed that he searched for the truths found in his books "in the spiritual world of my people" (Sydykbekov, 1989, p. 6). The large-scale and whole reconstruction of Kyrgyz life from this era, when they had their own state and religion, was an extremely new subject for Kyrgyz literature of the mid-1960s. Using such sources as the epos *Manas*, proverbs, and *sanžyra* (gynaecological tree) was a significantly new approach to writing fiction.

The sources Sydykbekov used as the foundation for reconstructing Kyrgyz society from the sixth to the eighth century makes his position over the ties between Yenisei Kyrgyz and Soviet Kyrgyz obvious. The writer is convinced that the Yenisei Kyrgyz are the bearers of their ancestors' values. He believes that the 'spiritual world' (*dukhovnyj mir*) of his contemporaries preserves the traces of this erstwhile spiritual culture. This fictional reconstruction with such historical and spiritual emphasis led to Sydykbekov virtually having created a new Kyrgyz identity and having anticipated the founding of an independent Kyrgyzstan. This was a serious reason for the

⁸ In the novel, Tengrism is a monotheistic system of Kyrgyz indigenous beliefs and spiritual practices, which are focused around the sky deity *Tengri*.

venerable classical writer of Kyrgyz literature, despite all his titles and merits, to have been subject to a wave of harsh criticism coming predominantly from Moscow but then being instantly supported locally (Ibraimov, 2008, p. 121).

In analysing the reasons for writers' growing interest "in the fictional presentation of history through the rules of novel narration," Boris Dubin believes:

During the period of the belated, and therefore accelerated modernisation of society corresponding to the radical notional refashioning of its guidelines, leading social groups or groups within society contending for a leadership role often carry their impressions of the best and genuine about the ideal society and cultural plenitude, about themselves and their mission, over into a conditionally constructed 'past,' just as others carry such impressions over into a conditional 'future.' Karl Mannheim called the first type of constructions 'ideological' and the second type 'utopian.'

(Dubin, 2003, pp. 4-5)

There were no visible signs of a crisis or the modernisation of the Soviet system in Soviet Kyrgyzstan in 1969. Tugolbaj Sydykbekov was almost sixty years of age at the time. He was a Soviet writer and was recognised by the state in every which way. For which reasons did the father of Kyrgyz literature look to the distant past and create his own model of Kyrgyz history? And was this construction ideological? Sydykbekov was unlikely to have pursued political objectives in *Kök Asaba*, such as the revival of the Kyrgyz state, and in this sense his novel was unlikely ideological; however, as a connoisseur of antiquity and writer, he undoubtedly had the goal of passing on knowledge that had been accumulated over years of his work. In this regard, *Kök Asaba* had a specific ideology, one of identification and self-identification. The ideology that Sydykbekov developed late in life was fundamentally different from the Kyrgyz identification and self-identification models that dominated in society at the end of the 1960s. Sydykbekov wrote a book that features bearers of the Kyrgyz spirit as the main characters (and maybe featuring the Kyrgyz spirit itself) who establish social order on the ground in accordance with the moral norms of Tengrism. It is difficult to call *Kök Asaba* a strictly historical novel and refer to its historical authenticity even by using these criteria while disregarding a literary analysis of the genre. What we have before us is more like a utopian construction of

the past rather than of the future; Sydykbekov moulded his desired image of the past.

Roland Barthes claimed: “literature is always unrealistic, but its very unreality permits it to question the world – though these questions can never be direct” (Barthes, 1994, p. 138). This Kyrgyz Soviet literary classic in 1969 provided a very un-Soviet perspective on the Kyrgyz past; the Kyrgyz centrism here is obvious. The publishing of *Kök Asaba* in 1989, which recreated the concept of ‘*kök asaba*’ – a banner of blue divine colour and of independent Kyrgyz – incredibly coincided with the ideas of Kyrgyz self-determination, already in the air but still yet to be shaped. If an independent state is what was unrealistic in 1969, then twenty years later it jumped from being a fairy tale and utopia to a possibility and a reality.

Several generations of Kyrgyz grew up over the twenty years that *Kök Asaba* sat on the shelf unpublished. They were non-Kyrgyz speakers and were taught that the Kyrgyz history started almost from the onset of the Soviet era. Although not even having been published in its own time, this book still had an influence on society. Tugolbaj Sydykbekov, for the most part not mentioning *Kök Asaba*, spoke of his work to restore the Kyrgyz history and culture through numerous collections and assemblies, actively wrote about folklore and traditions, and revealed his emotions in taking part in discussions on the Kyrgyz language. Sydykbekov’s work on Kyrgyz ethnic and cultural identification was unable to create a leading discourse in 1970s Soviet society, but did have an impact on its ‘inner’ circle, namely fellow writers and the intelligentsia. The modern-day prose writer Čolponbek Abykeev writes in genres and with a style that is completely different from Sydykbekov, but he notes that at one time he was impressed with Sydykbekov’s writing, namely as regards to “knowledge of the people’s soul” (interview with the author, 2012).

Kök Asaba became an entirely new conceptual piece in the literary field during the perestroika era. The claim can be made based on this novel that the new concept of national history and ethnic identity was first introduced to society through historical prose. Sadyr uulu Žumagazy, one of the founders of the public movement *Ašar*⁹, which in 1989 brought together young

⁹ Ašar is a public movement, which emerged in 1989 aimed at uniting young Kyrgyz people, who were promoting ideas of Kyrgyz language. In 1991, the movement became a part of the Kyrgyz Democratic Party.

Kyrgyz roaming about in rented apartments for years in and around the republic's capital, mentioned the novel *Kök Asaba* in an interview:

I was working at the time as a correspondent, and we had all been hearing the word going around that Sydykbekov had written a novel about the Kyrgyz and he wasn't allowed to publish it. There needs to be a life problem in order for social change to begin. Literature cannot allow this to get off the ground. [...] It can provide a breath of fresh air when things start. When I read the novel, I thought that it had exaggerations and idealisation; however, *Kök Asaba* fortified our spirit when we began our own movement.

(Interview with the author, 2012)

Therefore, twenty years later the social mission of the fictional utopia that Tugolbaj Sydykbekov created was established. This social mission fortified the spirit of young Kyrgyz who had become actively involved in perestroika. Sydykbekov through *Kök Asaba* to a certain extent fulfilled the role that Wachtel writes about in regards to the national poets of the Eastern Slavs.¹⁰

Sydykbekov, the founding father of Kyrgyz Soviet literature, was the first of the republic's intellectuals to reconstruct the models of the traditional community and spiritual and religious system of Tengrism. In this regard, Sydykbekov's novel both anticipated and laid the foundation for many political and religious discourses that emerged after gaining independence as the nation was building itself. In particular, the early 1990s would witness the vigorous rebirth of *kyrgyzčylyk* – a far-reaching range of traditional Kyrgyz practices, rituals, and religious faiths (Aitpaeva, 2008, pp. 47-66). Čoûn Omuraliev's book *Tengirčilik* [Tengrism] would be released in 1994 and become the first in a series of such studies.

The *Manas* Code as One of the Principal Codes of Perestroika

Issues pertaining to the study and publishing of the classic epos *Manas*¹¹ during the perestroika era created an especially delicate area. It will be fair

¹⁰ "In the absence of political unity writers were necessary to pull a nation together, to make fellow citizens aware of their very nationhood by creating the conditions for community" (Wachtel, 2006, p. 14).

¹¹ One of the biggest epics in the world, *Manas* contains enormous amounts of information accumulated for ages. In the twentieth century, scholars and writers emphasised the vast scale and the encyclopaedic nature of this epic. Chingiz Aitmatov introduced the epithet 'ocean-like *Manas*.' In the twenty-first century, apart from its encyclopaedic nature, which addresses various aspects of traditional livelihoods, another feature of the ancient epic

to note that the epic trilogy *Manas* was a reason for extensive, first and foremost ideological arguments, disputes, and persecutions throughout the entire Soviet era (Abdykarov & Žumaliev, 1995, pp. 5-27). In previous years, however, this process was confined to a limited group of specialists, namely folklorists and literary experts, writers and workers responsible for ideology. The rest of society got its information through turnkey decisions (instructions and decrees). Glasnost opened the door for the greater public to address this issue.

A heated discussion between influential Kyrgyz literary figures Aaly Tokombaev and Chingiz Aitmatov on one side, and Aaly Tokombaev and Tugolbaj Sydykbekov on the other side, emerged from 1986 to 1988 over the varying understanding of the version that the epos could be published in (Asanaliev, 1995, pp. 92-100; Akmatov, 1998, pp. 53-55; Artykbaev, 2004, pp. 143-144). Their opinions laid out in open letters were printed in the weekly newspaper *Kyrgyzstan Madaniâtý* [Culture of Kyrgyzstan], a body of the Union of Writers and the Ministry of Culture of Kyrgyz SSR. The most poignant material on the disputes over the epos *Manas* or the Kyrgyz language was in those years published simultaneously in Russian and Kyrgyz.

An interpretation of these disputes as being ‘personal’ and caused by personal rejection, misunderstanding, etc. is seen not only in several interviews with witnesses of these discussions, but also in Artykbaev’s textbook meant for a wide range of users and, first and foremost, for students (Artykbaev, 2004, p. 563). It becomes evident, however, that within the context of a large period of time, it was public discussions involving leading literary figures that had a direct impact on the structure of the literary field. Debates about epos, language, and banned literature that overflowed into the greater public sphere during the perestroika years were in fact a struggle to preserve or change ideological dispositions.

In 1988, the very politically prudent journal *Ala-Too* began to print Kazat Akmatov’s new novel *Kundu ajlangan žyldar* [The Years Rotating Around the Sun]. The following year, Akmatov’s work was released as an individual publication. Kasym Tynystanov was the first to attempt the literary

becomes of paramount importance: *Manas* is no longer just a symbol of antiquity and a repository for collective folk knowledge, but is also an actively evolving phenomenon. New versions of the epic have appeared that differ significantly from its classical versions.

interpretation of the epos *Manas* as a stage play (Bektenov & Ėrkebaev, 1991, pp. 34-42); however, *Kundu ajlangan žyldar* was the first Kyrgyz novel dedicated to the fate of the epos and its storytellers. No Kyrgyz prose writer before Kazat Akmatov wrote about the epos as a spiritual power that preserves the ethnic Kyrgyz identity, but rather about the *manasčy* [epos storytellers], as persons responsible for conserving the identity of their people.

If Akmatov had written a novel about the distant epical time, then typologically speaking this would be yet another construction of the past. He focuses on a different discourse, namely one of how times correlate. His novel depicts three times and spaces seemingly distant from each other, or as Mikhail Bakhtin would put it, three different 'chronotypes' (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 121). They can be conditionally designated as follows:

modern, on the whole corresponding to the time the novel was written and concerning the family of Ėlebaĭ Satarov and, through its prism, a specific level of Kyrgyz society in the mid-1980s;

historical, demonstrating the events of the revolutionary years and the subsequent 1930s through 1950s. The events of this period are concentrated predominantly in the village of Dolonotu and the city of Pišpek in the spheres where new, Soviet man took shape. We will note also that Dolonotu, well-remembered from the prose writer's first novel from 1982 *Mezgil* [Time], in his fictional world is for him what, for example, Vešenskaâ was for Mikhail Šolokhov, namely the place where problems of epic proportions are concentrated;

mythological (prehistoric), concerning the events of a dateless time when the land of the Kyrgyz was conquered by the *khejkhuns*¹², while they themselves were taken over by foreigners.

Two of the novel's central storylines are involved in the lives of the two main characters whose evolvment dovetailed with the 1917 Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet system. They are the same age and they happened to live during the same years; however, besides this thing in common, they had one more similarity as well: names. The novel mentions the name Žajsan¹³ for the first time when describing the events of this era, which we can conditionally designate as a mythological era. The novel's legend reads that in the ancient times the Kyrgyz were conquered

¹² In the novel, the Khejkhuns are the enemies of the Kyrgyz.

¹³ Žajsan is the name of the main hero.

and enslaved by the *khejkhuns* to the point where they began to forget their own past, erstwhile freedom, and, it seems, came to terms forever with being subjects. During this catastrophic time, however, there appeared a person amongst the *žeztandajs* – one of the Kyrgyz clans – who was able to awaken within his fellow Kyrgyz the qualities that the foreigners had so scrupulously annihilated, namely the memory of their glorious past and desire for freedom. The poet Yraman was this man, and the fiery word of epos was his weapon against his people's forgetfulness. The smart and cunning enemy perceived the rebirth of epos fearfully and tremulously. After a long and intense search, the *khejkhunds* found and killed both the poet and his entire family, with only one boy, Yraman's son Žajsan, having survived. Žajsan continued the family lineage and the work of the *žeztandajs* by having inherited their distinguished attribute: the gift of the storyteller. Furthermore, Žajsan became one of the forty allies of Manas and fought for Kyrgyz independence not only in eloquent word, but also on the battlefield.

A block of information that can be designated as the Manas code is introduced into the novel's tissue through the legend about the *žeztandajs*. This code, first and foremost, contains the concept of an independent Kyrgyz state, while the *manasčy* [epos storytellers] are the bearers of this concept. Therefore, Žajsan in the novel's semantics is not just a name, but also a symbol of Kyrgyz self-identification. It is not just a name, but also a fate. Henceforth, young boys from the *žeztandajs* lineage named Žajsan were supposed to become the keepers, storytellers, and creators of epos. Two Žajsans from the time of the revolution would become closely connected and distantly related, all the while not knowing each other nor their ancestry. Meanwhile, common ideas and meanings would be stretched forth through people with the same purpose at different times.

The main characters of the novel's historical section perceive wielding the gift of *manasčy* as a duty. They interpret this gift not as the fantasy of poets and not as an imagined world, but as a certain reality. The writer makes the magnificent observation of this quality of the people's consciousness in the following episode. The Soviet commission determining people's social class and, given this determining their fate, was trying to define who the renowned storyteller Čoŭke¹⁴ was: a rich man or poor man? The Kyrgyz

¹⁴ The famous epic chanter Čoŭke Omur Uulu was born in the region of Issyk-Kul Lake in 1863 and died several years after the 1917 Revolution, in 1925.

would respond amicably: a *manasčy*. This, however, was not an answer for the commission. And in not having been able to get the needed answer, the commission decided to figure out who Manas was, a rich man or poor man, making the people completely perplexed. As it turned out, the people no longer could remember Manas having actually existed. The question's very wording (a rich man or poor man) and the people's response (*manasčy*) demonstrate how fundamentally different views collided. The dramatic misunderstanding that emerged over Manas and *manasčy* between the new authorities and the people was a precursor of the future tragedy of epos and its adherents.

This new era, its refusal to compromise and its nihilism, inevitably conflicted with the duty of the Žajsans. This new era denied their right to their original fate and faced them with a tragic choice to make: changing your name meant changing your fate. The writer was extremely anxious about what was stronger: the blood of hundreds of generations of *žeztandajs* that withstood the *khejkhun* yoke, the fate name, or the harsh present? What depends on man himself in such a situation?

Both Žajsans were forced to flee their native lands and both came to a dramatic dilemma. It is with this dilemma that a new stage in the life of each character commences, and thus the two narrative centres in the novel emerge.

The two main characters ended up on opposite sides of the barricades. They crossed paths for the first time in a workshop where a monument to Manas was being made. This monument, called *Boštonduk yryna* [Canto to Liberty], was almost completed when people confident of what they were doing appeared one night and destroyed it. Èlebaj Satarov, one of the Žajsans to have changed his name, was one of the main outlaws that night. This main character actively, calculatedly, and persistently broke new ground, while the second main character did so below the radar, but was unwavering in sticking to the original plan allowing him not to betray the duty of a storyteller and the work of his ancestry. Yes, he did not become a grand storyteller, just as was predict of him in his youth and as he had dreamed. Yes, Žajsan, at a trying time when he was expelled from the Komsomol and was worked over for lack of consciousness, got cold feet and did not attend the funeral of his teacher. And yes, he tried to hide his name and origin in

conversation. This main character, however, did not go through a complete and irreversible transformation, as did Satarov.

What is symbolic is that it is around the monument where the life paths of these two main characters cross; this monument in the novel's semantics personifies such notions as the independent past and national liberty. Žajsan tenaciously builds the monument, while Èlebaj tenaciously destroys it. This is how people with originally the same purpose dedicate their lives to the directly opposite.

The two main characters' history at a junction and in mutual reflection submerge the reader into serious thought, while discovering at the same time the semantic value of the novel's composition and storyline. The mythological, historical, and modern sections are present as a whole within, although their content and development vary. Over the long-term, a person's life is objectivised and protrudes in its essential features. During the difficult years, Èlebaj Satarov rejected the past and began life over again beginning in 1929. The revolutionary present, which he saw as taking root forever, had swallowed him whole. But the future arrived in the shape of younger son who had become a sculptor. This future, with the son's upside-down inscription on the father's sculpture, condemned the elder Satarov for having lived his life erroneously and with no purpose. Therefore, Èlebaj Satarov, in having at some point rejected the past, was deprived of the future. He lives only in his own present, although "everything that belongs only to the present dies together with him" (Bakhtin, 1968, p. 504). Kazat Akmatov claims that the Satarov model of life in the long-term future is doomed and pointless. The life story of the novel's two main characters has a clearly expressed moral in the writer's interpretation: a person is at will to make his own choice at any time and will be responsible for this choice. Yet one more conceptual nuance of the novel's name is revealed at the very end. It has the idea of a figure circle that does not know rifts. Èlebaj Satarov, in having broken his connection with the past and eventually changed his name after the 1917 Revolution from Žajsanbek syn Žèèñčoro,¹⁵ permanently falls out of the cosmic and historical whole of his native people and transforms into a miserable "little piece of fuzz in the wind." He was not only not a *manasčy*, namely a son of his own people, but was also not the

¹⁵ The name Žajsanbek was a symbol of the epic tellers and did not fit the Soviet ideology.

son of his own father and the father of his own son, which in Akmatov's conception is closely connected.

There are main-character impersonators in the storyline of Kazat Akmatov's *Kundu ajlangan žyldar*, and storylines of such nature in a typological aspect are linked to initiation (Lotman, 1973, pp. 9-41). The long-standing mythological and ceremonial carcass does clearly exist in this novel, although it is unlikely that the writer was consciously focusing on it. On the one hand, the ancient layout of the storyline in the novel is stuffed with perestroika issues. On the other hand, the writer interprets the 'fatal hour' of history as a test by having placed at the centre of the narration the image of a novice *manasčy* and two ways for it to develop in a non-traditional environment. Therefore, the storyline's original semantics (an initiation as a harsh test that results in young boys becoming men) are revealed in *Kundu ajlangan žyldar*.

When I asked Kazat Akmatov during an interview how he came up with and wrote this novel, he said that the years and years of disputes and brouhahas in academia that he was a part of as a representative of the Party agencies awakened his artistic interest. In other words, Kazat Akmatov came to the idea of writing the novel *Kundu ajlangan žyldar* through his public and political activities. He was one of the founders of the movement *Kyrgyzdyn demoratiâlyk kyjmyly* [Kyrgyz Democratic Movement] in 1989. The writer said that the memorial *Canto to Liberty*, which was destroyed three times in his novel, is a symbol of the efforts that Kyrgyz intellectuals put forth to celebrate the one thousandth anniversary of the epos *Manas* (Abdykarov & Žumaliev, 1995, pp. 114-116). These efforts led to nothing three times during the Soviet era, and only in 1995, after gaining independence, was celebrated the millennium of the great epos. The writer also stresses that for him this was research, in which he wanted to understand the nature of the epos *Manas* and its storytellers. Kazat Akmatov is to this day deeply concerned with what the mechanisms are for revitalising the epos as a person becomes the bearer of epical knowledge.

In 1989, *Kundu ajlangan žyldar* was the first in a line of fictional works on the epos. After Kyrgyzstan gained its independence, a series of epic-inspired works would be released, giving shape to an individual block in the fabric of Kyrgyz literature. In other words, Akmatov's novel set change in motion in the structure of the literary field. This, it seems,

is the case where change in one individual area of the social system, on the one hand, signalled fundamental changes long overdue in society, and on the other hand, energised this change by impacting the social structure as a whole. The link is evident between Kazat Akmatov's perestroika-era novel and the subsequent course in the development of social and political life: Akmatov's prose was very accurate in anticipating the development of social and political events. In 1989, his prose introduced, or better yet injected into society the *Manas* code or the idea of Kyrgyz independence that needed to be fought for. When just beginning to build an independent state, the first president's ideologues tried to use *Manas* as state ideology (Akaev, 1999, pp. 6-24). The slogan "*Manastyn arbagy koldosun*" [May the Spirit of *Manas* Guard Us] was one of those used during the second Kyrgyz revolution in 2010. Now, twenty-five years after its publication, the ideology expressed in the novel has become virtually commonplace amongst soil-bound patriots (*počvennikov*): national and patriotic non-governmental organisations and movements.¹⁶

What is the nature of the evident link between Kazat Akmatov's novel and the subsequent social development? Akmatov himself never mentioned his possible impact on social development during several conversations from 2012 to 2014. He insisted otherwise that the literary criticism of those years did not appreciate this novel.¹⁷ We would add that the novel has yet to be duly grasped and appreciated in Kyrgyz literary studies. Questions, however, that we ask in this article go beyond classic literary studies. How can the conceptual similarity be explained between the novel *Kundu ajlangan žyldar* and the subsequent course of Kyrgyz history? In contemplating literature's influence on society and a writer's responsibility, Sergej Pereslegin mentions the varying impact of books at different periods of time. His observations based on global literary history shows that during the years when one political regime falls and its successor has yet to arrive,

¹⁶ When several *Manas* epic chanters embarked on the election campaign on behalf of certain political parties before the Parliamentary elections in 2010, it triggered debates in society on whether *Manas* chanters could participate in the elections. This debate comes from the widespread notions that *Manas* chanters must be 'above and beyond' political struggles. Nazira Aaly kyzy, the famous TV and radio producer, put this notion as such: "I cannot agree with the idea that *manasčy* belong to a certain political party. They belong to the nation as a whole" (public debate at the Aigine Cultural Research Centre, March 5, 2010).

¹⁷ Indeed, see the sarcastic analysis of the novel in Artykbaev, 2004, pp. 598-601.

books see their impact on society grow enormously. He labelled the role literature plays in such periods of time as ‘crystallizing.’

At the time when all old connections have crumbled away, the question of what the world would crystallize into was on the table. The world could crystallize into any one of many systems.

(Pereslegin, 1998)

Kazat Akmatov’s artistic genius created one of the social-development models based on traditional values, one of which was the epos *Manas*, in 1989 when the Soviet system in the republic was still functioning well. Akmatov’s own double position could be used to try to explain why this model emerged: he was represented in two fields, the fields of literature and power. During the perestroika era, he combined his work as secretary of the Republican Union of Writers with his artistic quest. On the one hand, he was in the thicket of social and political events, while on the other hand, he strenuously contemplated the fate of the epos and, through it, the fate of his people: “A writer detects the meanings in the world and turns them into texts that others will understand” (*idem*). At the crossroads of two fields of work during the perestroika years, Kazat Akmatov detected the meanings hovering about in society and created the first reconstruction in the history of Kyrgyz prose of the traditional sacral relationship attitude towards the epos *Manas* and its storytellers. In other words, Akmatov gave life to the process that in anthropology is called ‘revitalisation,’ ‘invention,’ or ‘realisation of traditions’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Wallace, 1956, pp. 264-281).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the reconstruction of traditions took off in all spheres: from name christening to using, for example, grazing lands. Building an independent Kyrgyzstan and searching for a state ideology energised the nations that Kazat Akmatov wrote about in his novel during the perestroika era. Akmatov had friends and enemies, colleagues and opponents amongst those who would further develop the country, and it is not fortuitous that his novel is often brought up in the conversations of intellectual activists of the perestroika movement. It is also worth noting that many Kyrgyz have not even read Akmatov’s novel; however, all these people were, first and foremost, the writer’s contemporaries. If they had not read his novel and especially had not been guided by it, they worked in one social space, came across similar meanings, and examined possible

options and plans. The model that Kazat Akmatov conceptualised for the first time in fiction became one of the most sought after. Sergei Pereslegin's words can be used to put this differently, although they relate to medieval literature: "it's just that a lot of people read the same books, thought over the same issues, and came as a result to entirely and statistically specific decisions" (Pereslegin, 1998).

Conclusion: Anticipating and Constructing the Twenty-First Century

If one is to "contemplate culture globally as a metamorphosing form of consciousness that finds an outlet in individual texts" (Âmpol'skij, 2014), then the claim can be made that the changing social consciousness during the perestroika era in Soviet Kyrgyzstan found its voice in fictional historical and epical prose; fundamental shifts took place in the field of Kyrgyz literature thanks to these topics being included. First, the position of the literary field within the field of power changed, as the level of independence and self-organisation of the field of literature grew, and as conceptions "that surmounted the regimes in power" took shape (Ušakin, 2013). This nature of creative thinking helped Kyrgyz writers overcome the standards and principles of the Soviet reproduction of ideas earlier than historians and other intellectuals.

The change of the authorities and literature's ideological dispositions engendered change in the internal fabric of the literary field. This period when, as Bourdieu said, "liberty and audacity enter a specific constructive principle of the field as objective potency or even as a necessity" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 30). Liberty and audacity violently rattled the fortified systemic ties, while the field configuration changed, its thematic homogeneity having fallen apart. New types of capital became part of prose, first and foremost symbolic capital through topics on the epos *Manas* and ancient national history. Moreover, previous connections and priorities were still actively on display. In other words, a situation of variety and numerous opportunities arose in fictional prose during the perestroika era. It is the homogeneity, width, and co-existence of ideologically mutually excluding works that create the unmatched uniqueness of the field of literature during perestroika.

Historical literature profoundly and intricately experienced and deliberated this breaking point in history. Before political scientists, political strategists, historians, and analysts, it was literature that initiated studies and created the first models in the field of national rebirth and development. It is in the field of literature that the process of the 'rebirth' and 'realisation' of all sorts of traditions began. This is where for the first time there emerged narratives that would later become the main discourse of an independent society. The historical novel was the first to rehabilitate and legitimate several historical figures. Literature made public what for decades was discussed behind closed doors in literary studies, linguistics, and history. Kyrgyz prose as a sphere of public activity during the perestroika era fulfilled the sociologizing function of influencing the subsequent development of society (Pereslegin, 1998). This took place not because every citizen read these novels or because they were publically promoted or specially implemented. This took place because "the functional impression of history" (Dubin, 2003) coincided perfectly with the current historic moment and the social atmosphere. Independence onset in the wake of perestroika, and all the issues of state development and the search for a new identity were poignantly designated. The models and constructions that took shape in literature in the Kyrgyz language became attractive for politicians and public figures. Patriarch Tugolbaj Sydykbekov in 1991 blessed the rule of the first president of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev and was amongst his first advisors (Muratov, 2009, p. 4). The search for a new identity in independent Kyrgyzstan took place predominantly through the revival of the Kyrgyz language and traditions.

Now, twenty-five years later, the positions of the field of literature and the field of power in respect to each other have radically changed. The field of literature is free from the political authorities and depends more on the economy; however, historical prose is significant, if not the leading type of prose in the structure of this field. The symbolic capital of the perestroika era has become profitable economic and guaranteed political capital. It is during perestroika that this interaction between the two aforementioned fields began and changed not only the structure of the literary field, but also that of the authorities itself. Therefore, it would unlikely be an exaggeration to repeat that Kyrgyz prose during the perestroika era served as both crystallizing and sociologizing functions. Kyrgyz prose laid the foundation for

the national formation of myths that is actively practiced in literature, politics, history, and many other spheres of life in modern-day Kyrgyzstan.¹⁸ How and why things turned out this way is the subject for another interdisciplinary study.

Translated from Russian by Scott BEAN

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¹⁸ Nationalism as one of the strategies to remain relevant after communism is explored in Wachtel, 2006, pp. 98-106.

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Abstract

The article explores prose published in Kyrgyz language during perestroika period. The article argues that the diversity of the modern literary field had been founded back in 1985-1991. The new variety of Kyrgyz prose in perestroika time reflected the key trends, newly emerging in the society, and in turn contributed to the transformation of the society. This prose was first to bring into a public space the themes of nation and state building, which have been being broadly discussed for last twenty-five years. Those themes, being a symbolic capital during perestroika, have turned into advantageous economic and safe bet political capital during independence years.

Keywords: field of literature, Kyrgyz prose, perestroika, the epic *Manas*

Résumé

La prose kirghize sous la perestroika: anticiper ou construire le futur?

Cet article explore la prose publiée en kirghiz à la fin de la période soviétique. L'article avance l'idée d'une diversité du champ littéraire actuel, héritée des années 1985-1991. La nouvelle palette de la prose kirghize sous la perestroïka reflète les tendances clés, qui apparurent dans la société et qui, à leur tour, contribuèrent à la transformation de cette société. Cette prose a été la première à intégrer dans l'espace public, les thèmes de la construction de la nation et de l'État, qui ont fait l'objet de vives discussions au Kirghizstan, au cours des vingt-cinq dernières années. D'un statut de capital symbolique à l'époque de la perestroïka, ces thèmes

sont passés à celui de capital économique rentable et de capital politique sécurisé pendant les années d'indépendance.

Mots-clés : champ littéraire, prose kirghize, perestroïka, poème épique *Manas*

Аннотация

Кыргызская проза периода перестройки: предчувствие или конструирование будущего?

В статье изучается художественная проза, опубликованная в период перестройки на кыргызском языке. К рассмотрению предлагается идея о том, что разнородность литературного поля, которая наблюдается в настоящее время, в основе была сформирована в 1985-1991 годы. Новая палитра кыргызской прозы периода перестройки, как в зеркале, отразила ключевые тенденции, зарождавшиеся в обществе и, в свою очередь, повлияла на трансформацию общества. Эта проза впервые ввела в широкое социальное пространство темы национального строительства и государственности, которые активно обсуждаются на протяжении 25 лет в Кыргызстане. Подобные темы из символического капитала в годы перестройки стали выгодным экономическим и беспроектным политическим капиталом в годы независимости.

Ключевые слова: поле литературы, кыргызская проза, перестройка, эпос *Манас*.

Gulnara AITPAEVA

Kyrgyz Prose During Perestroika:
Anticipating or Constructing the Future?



Annexe n° 16